


Nigerian Seeks Justice Against Domestic Abuse

"The change we so desire in the world today starts with each one of us. Don't give up."

— Naomi Osemedua

Naomi Osemedua says it should be easier for women to speak out about gender violence.

"Victims are afraid to come out and talk, as they are afraid of stigmatization," she explains. "They are afraid that when they come out people will say they are useless or that whatever happened to them was their fault."

Naomi Osemedua, center, stands up for  justice with fellow anti-abuse advocates in Abuja, Nigeria.

As in many cultures, women in Nigeria are often blamed for their own abuse, with critics suggesting their clothes or appearance provoked the assault or violence. Osemedua, a YALI Network member, founded the Nigerian branch of Making a Difference (M.A.D.) Positive International in Abuja in 2011 to break the silence surrounding sexual abuse and domestic violence. The organization's work extends beyond the capital city to Lagos and Abeokuta and to the rural areas of Kwara, Delta and Rivers states.

Osemedua, 36 and an abuse victim herself, has positive messages for women and youth — that they can become agents for social change.

"We must not talk alone but create action," she says.

The advocate constantly responds to requests for information about abuse and provides inspiration to help stop it. She regularly appears as a guest on local radio programs using passion and humor when talking about abuse, girls' education and other women's issues. She reaches out to women and girls, men and boys through social media as well as public and private partner organizations like WellBeing Foundation Africa, Project Pink Blue and GenVoices.

Although Osemedua estimates that so far those efforts have reached more than 10,000 women, it's not enough.


"It has been overwhelming because when you think you have started, you discover that you have not even scratched the surface," she explains.

Through M.A.D., in 2014 Osemedua helped organize Nigeria's "1 Billion Rising for Justice" event to demand justice for women who have been sexually assaulted. Organizers of the event, which happened on February 14 in cities around the world, proclaimed, "I refuse to stand by as more than 1 billion women experience violence. ... I am rising for justice."

In Abuja people danced to the words of the "1 Billion Rising for Justice" anthem, which includes

these words: “I can see a world where we all live, safe and free from all oppression. No more rape or incest or abuse. Women are not a possession.”

Osemedua is confident that change is on the horizon and that gender-based violence will end. “It may take time, but it will be worth the wait as people are searching for sincere and genuine change-makers,” she says.

Naomi Osemedua, right, is interviewed  by a member of the local media in Abuja, Nigeria.

Osemedua contributes to her community in other ways. The YALI Network member is active in the government’s YouWin! Program, serving as a volunteer mentor for entrepreneurs ages 18 to 45. She also works with with a leadership academy for girls ages 10 to 14 that focuses on leadership development. She says her work with the academy has been fulfilling.

“The work is important because these young girls will be the leaders of tomorrow, and there is no telling how far the impact will go. We believe that one girl can change the world.”

“Other YALI network members can help girls in their communities by mentoring them. Even if it is just one girl at a time. ... with one girl, over time much can be achieved,” she adds. “We hope that through our work with these girls that each one of them will indeed have a sense of true leadership and settle for nothing less than the best that they can be.”

One of five siblings, the new mother credits her father with being her “greatest supporter and inspiration. She says her father “continually lavished love and affection on all of us ... [and] made sure we had the best education.”

Osemedua says she has been “greatly inspired” by the YALI Network. “Just reading about all the great stuff others are doing makes me want to do more for my community and the world.”

A [video](#) of Nigeria’s 2014 1 Billion Rising for Justice dance event is available on YouTube. The song’s lyrics are available on the 1 Billion Rising for Justice [website](#).
